SKETCHES

OF THE

LIFE AND GENIUS

OF

SHAKSPEARE:

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

BY

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SHAKSPEARE.

THE wonders and sublimity of the Heavens have formed subjects for a most eloquent and impressive discourse before this Institute. Health and beauty, physiologically considered, have also been exhibited to you in their most alluring shape and colors. Others have presented to you the instinct of flowers, and the beauty of ancient literature. But what is instinct, animal or vegetable? What are health and beauty? What the delights of literature? What all the glories, all the immensity, all the mystery, and majesty of the physical world, when compared with that quality which we denominate *mind?* That for which every thing was formed. That through which every thing is enjoyed. That without which, every thing—is nothing.

> "A beam ethereal, sullied and absorbed,
> Though sullied and dishonored, still divine."

It is a mistake, to suppose that in the various systems of the universe, man is an insignificant or unimportant being. He is, let it be remembered,

an immortal being. The favorite of Heaven, the designed tenant of Heaven. His body springs from the dust, it is true, and to dust must return. But the mind "rests and expatiates upon things to come;" and wonderful as is all creation, the mind of man is most wonderful of all.

After creating, breathing into existence this mighty universe, God formed man in his own image, after his own likeness, and gave him dominion over all the earth. Of all terrestrial creation, He is the only immortal part. And the sun shall become as black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon become as blood, and the Heavens depart as a scroll that is rolled together; yet he shall flourish in immortal youth.

What a piece of work is a Man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a God!

The mind of man is competent, as you have perceived, to explain the philosophy, the uses, purposes, properties, and character of all those glorious orbs floating through the measureless and boundless realms of space. But who shall explain the mind of man? Human reason is never so bewildered and perplexed, never so foiled and baffled as in an ex-

ercise upon itself. Could it but only clearly comprehend its own nature, it would have attained greater perfection than mortals yet have reached. It would imbibe greater and more glowing views of its original, than it will ever belong to the lot of finite beings to enjoy. That is a perfection which is reserved for the period when mortals shall put on immortality—when we shall, instead of seeing as through a glass darkly, behold our Maker face to face, and unite with the cherubim and the seraphim in realms of everlasting joy, in chanting hosannahs to the Most High.

If such be the difficulties in estimating the intellectual structure and moral character of ourselves, what must be the difficulties in ascertaining those of others; *what* of those, who for some all-wise purpose seem, while in nature they pertain to man, to belong also to angels, and thus to form an immediate and connecting link between earth and Heaven.

That men have been directly inspired, by the supreme disposer of events, for religious purposes, no one will venture to deny. And that men are also intellectually inspired occasionally beyond their fellow men, for the purpose of conferring intellectual and moral blessings and benefits upon mankind, is by no means inconsistent with the beneficence of

the Deity, and may be, therefore, reverentially asserted. And if there ever was a mortal who *was* thus inspired, who compassed all creation at a single glance, who sounded and unfolded all the depths, workings and intricacies of the human heart, who possessed by intuition what others never could acquire by labor, even with all appliances and means to boot, it was Shakspeare. What is the philosophy of Bacon? said to be the wisest and brightest of mankind! I reject the slanderous part of the quotation.—What the science of Newton, lustrous and imperishable as the stars to which directed, in the advantages which they have shed upon the world, compared with the exposition of the springs and motives of human action, for which we are indebted to the immortal bard? What is it to be told even in his own magnificent language, that

> "The Heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,
> Observe degrees, priority, and place,
> Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
> Office and custom in all line of order."

> "The proper study of mankind, is man."

Who then was this sweet swan of Avon, as he has been called by one of the greatest of his contemporaries. What he was, all the world, which he embellished, delighted, and improved, can readily

tell you. But *who* he was, is an inquiry not so easily answered. Indeed, some have gone so far as really to contend, thereby destroying at least one of the most pleasurable illusions of life, that no such man as Shakspeare ever lived, and the basis of this conclusion seems to be, that no other such man ever lived, which cannot be denied. And that those immortal works which are associated in our memories with that name, are the combined product of the united efforts of all the choice and master spirits of that age in which Shakspeare is supposed to have flourished. This ungenerous effort has not been confined to the English bard. For a similar attempt has been made to strip the father of Grecian poetry, Homer, of all his glory, by the suggestion, that he was but the itinerant vender of those intellectual treasures which legitimately belonged to the efforts of other and greater minds.

History, however, aided by tradition, her faithful handmaid, seems to have settled the question in despite of unbelief, as to the identity of the subject of this brief and imperfect sketch, and I proceed to trace him from his birth to the tomb.

On the 23d day of April, old style, which answers to the 4th day of May, new style, in the year 1564, in an obscure town on the borders of the

Avon, in the county of Warwickshire, about eight miles from Warwick castle, and sixteen miles from Kenilworth castle, in a small cottage, of obscure parents, and with obscure hopes, Will Shakspeare was born. By that birth Stratford was rendered more famous than all London by its accumulated honors.

From his birth until his eighteenth year, all that can be gathered of the career of Shakspeare, is substantially nothing—that interesting period of existence which exercises so important an influence over all the rest, which is so essential in the formation and comprehension of the character and life of a man, is almost utterly wanting. This circumstance is calculated to impress upon the public mind, the importance of preserving memorials of men and things, with a view to the information and instruction of after ages. Historical Societies, although they may appear to their cotemporaries as unimportant, inasmuch as they for the most part record matters which are familiar to those around them, yet in relation to posterity, their labors may be followed by the most beneficial results. They should therefore be encouraged when it is remembered that the richest lessons of morality and experience are to be derived from past times, and thus

when once lost they are never to be retrieved. And assuredly if there be any portion of history, which should be interesting to man, it is that emphatically which pertains to the character, pursuits and condition of men.

Although less than three centuries have elapsed since the birth of the poet, no more is known of his early history than has been handed down to us of the history of Homer after a lapse of nearly three thousand years. How is this to be accounted for?

First, he was born in Stratford, and he flourished in London, thereby, as it were, dividing and distracting his career, and diminishing the opportunities of lasting or permanent traditions in regard to him.

Secondly. His works were dramatic, almost entirely, and consist therefore more in the exhibition of others than of himself. Indeed the only references to himself are to be found in his sonnets.

But, *Thirdly.* We presume that there was very little prior to his arrival at manhood, that was deemed worthy of remembrance. His youth, it is obvious, was spent in shallows and in miseries, and if it exhibited any variety it was but the sad variety of wretchedness. Nevertheless, more extensive materials would have remained for his Biographers had he been considered at that time as he was a cen-

tury after his death. It is therefore to be inferred that the estimation in which his works were held during his life, afforded no earnest of their future glory and immortality. In support of this idea, it will be found on turning to Baker's Chronicles, a work of great antiquity and value, that, while Berbige and others are spoken of in the most flattering terms, Shakspeare and Jonson are mentioned with comparative coldness. We cannot do better, as it is a salutary commentary upon the vanity and fallacy of fame, than to give at length the summary of the great men of the time of Elizabeth, in the language of the chronicler himself.

The ocean, says he, is not more boundless, than the number of men of note in her time. But though all of them cannot be reckoned, yet some of them must not be omitted; and to begin with statesmen.

An exquisite statesman, for his own ends, was Robert Earl of Leicester, and for his country's good, Sir William Cecil, Lord Burleigh—as also Sir Francis Walsingham, that great underminer of conspirators; famous seamen, were the Earl of Cumberland, the Lord Thomas Howard, afterwards Earl of Suffolk—and of meaner rank, Sir John Hawkins, Sir Walter Raleigh, Cavendish, Preston, Ryman, and to name the worthiest last,

Sir Francis Drake, who, though he were but a short square bodied man, yet his great acts have made the Spaniards believe that he was some goodly personage.

Great commanders by land, were Robert, Earl of Essex, the Lord Willoughby, the Lord Grey of Wilton, Sir Francis Veer, Sir Roger Williams, and the honor of his family and our English nation, Sir John Norris.

Learned gentlemen and writers, were Sir Thomas Chaloner, employed by Queen Elizabeth as her lieger in Spain, who wrote five books on the restoring of the English Commonwealth, in elegant verses—while, as he said, he lived in a stove in winter, and in a barn in summer. Roger Askam, born in Yorkshire, notably skilful in the Greek and Latin tongues, who had sometimes been schoolmaster to Queen Elizabeth, but taking too great delight in gaming and cock fighting, he both lived and died in mean estate, yet left behind him sundry monuments of wit and industry. But above all, the admirable Sir Philip Sidney, who by writing in a light argument showed how excellently and beyond all comparison, he could have done in a grave.

Learned divines were John Jewell, Bishop of Salisbury, who wrote an apology for the Protestant

doctrine, and died at scarce fifty-five years of age. Richard Hooker, preacher at the Temple, who with too much meekness smothered his great learning, yet hath something discovered it in his five books of Ecclesiastical Discipline. Alexander Knowell, Dean of Paul's, who, forbearing deeper works, set forth a Catechism, according to the doctrine of the English Church.

After such men, it might be thought ridiculous to speak of stage players, but seeing excellency in the meanest things deserves remembering, and Roscius the comedian is recorded in history with such commendation, it may be allowed us to do the like with some of our own nation. Richard Burbige and Edward Allen, two such actors as no age must ever look to see the like, and to make their comedies complete, Richard Tarleton, who, for the part called the clown's part, never had his match, never will have.

For writers of plays, and such as had been players themselves, William Shakspeare and Benjamin Jonson have specially left their names recommended to posterity. Heaven save the mark.

So passes the glory of the world; and this Ben Jonson and Will Shakspeare, are, in our flowing cups, freshly remembered, when death and damned

oblivion have wrapped the bones, the works, and the fame of nine-tenths of those, whose merits are thus trumpeted to the world. Why the very queen herself, the age itself, has drawn more lustre from those writers of plays, and those who had been players themselves, than from the whole long line of titled nobility. But let us not anticipate.

All that is to be found in regard to the parentage, education and employment of Shakspeare, is not only exceedingly scattered and confused, but rather matter of inference than of fact. And the course of reasoning adopted, in order to arrive at greater certainty and precision on these subjects, is often much more amusing and ingenious than sound and instructive; and Ben Jonson truly observes, you must see the man, and read his life, in his works.

A most learned investigation has been instituted to ascertain whether his father was a butcher or a wool stapler—and whole volumes have been written upon that subject. As if it were of any importance, when it is so perfectly obvious, if I may border a little upon the facetious, that at least he himself was no butcher, and certainly no wool-gatherer, as the world has long since ascertained. His ancestors could impart no glory to him, even if their current of life had crept through scoundrels

ever since the flood: and they could deprive him of none. He shone in original, and not in reflected lustre. He was, in his own language, himself alone: self-dependent and self-sufficient; and he filled, and he continues to fill, the universe with the radiance of his intellectual beams. To give us as perfect a notion of his glory as language can convey, it is only necessary again to mention that such are the stupendous powers of the works ascribed to him, that, with a weakness that always doubts what it cannot comprehend, or equal, or approach, it has been suggested that no such man ever lived, or as has been said, that if he did, instead of producing those works which amaze mankind, all the productions of the illustrious men of his day were ascribed to him, and thereby imparted to him a factitious glory—What! Did he write none of these? Is there not a star in this glorious constellation that legitimately bears his name? Were his cotemporaries so affluent in genius, and so indifferent to the fame of such productions, as to allow him to carry off undisputed all their glory? If he wrote any one, he was capable of writing all. If they were written by others, he appropriated all of the same high and distinguished stamp; for none of the age rival those which are imputed to him.

There may be some reason for supposing, nay, there are some examples to that effect, that there were hireling poets enough, who were willing to lend their aid to the powerful and the influential and the bountiful. Yet I presume there were none who would doom their offspring to probable beggary and contempt, by selecting so obscure and indigent a man as Shakspeare, who no revenue had, but his good spirits, for their putative paternity.—These plays were written in exile—when driven from his birth-place by poverty and prosecution, to wander in want and distress through the metropolis of England.

No account is to be found of his education. Some suppose that he was educated at a free school, others that he was entirely self-taught. But all agree that his course of instruction terminated when he was little more than twelve years of age, and when his services were required by his father. In respect to the nature of his employment after this time, there is a still greater diversity of opinion, than in regard to the sources of his instruction. Some say he was a butcher—some that he was a wool-stapler—some that he was a glover—some that he was a schoolmaster—and last, and least—some that he was an attorney's clerk. Even the bare supposi-

tion is enough to dignify all these vocations, through all time to come. Let us briefly examine them, as becomes the time.

Those who allege that Shakspeare was a butcher, in the first place infer it from that being the supposed occupation of his father, although even *this* is not much more than a supposition. But setting out with that idea, the mode in which they attempt maintaining it, at least to a mind accustomed to weigh and compare evidence, is almost too farcical to be entitled to be gravely considered. In Hamlet, act 5th, scene 2d, occurs this passage in the dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio.

> "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we will."

From the sentiment thus expressed, which I understand to convey no other idea, than that an overruling Providence governs our objects, whatever may be our own preparation, or the direction designed to be given to them. The learned commentators infer that Shakspeare must have been a butcher, because in their view this passage refers to the skewers used by butchers in selling their meat, and in enforcement of this idea they relate a story to this effect. That a person engaged in similar business, had used, not poetically it is true, nor with the same

application, almost the same language. Speaking of his apprentice, "My boy," said he, "can rough hew the skewers very well, but I have always to shape their ends." This looks like a story framed for the occasion—but supposing it to be sooth and that Shakspeare really had this simile in his mind, which is all that the argument can possibly claim, it is very far from establishing the position they assume. Most of his illustrations are drawn from the simplest and humblest materials. He makes one of his mightiest efforts turn upon the disposition of a pocket handkerchief, another upon the influence of fortune telling, a third upon an ordinary family feud.

Still further to support this notion, they refer to the second part of King Henry the Sixth, act 3d, scene 1st; the speech of Henry to Margaret, which, so far as relates to our present purpose, runs thus:

And as the butcher takes away the calf
And binds the wretch and beats it when it strays,
Bearing it to the bloody slaughter house,
Even so remorseless have they borne him hence;
And as the dam runs lowing up and down,
Looking the way her harmless young one went
And can do naught but wait her darling's loss,
Even so myself bewails good Gloucester's case,
With sad unhelpful tears.

Others again say that he was a wool stapler, or rather served his father in that employment. And to support this, in the first place they allege that it derives probability from the analogy between the business of a butcher and a wool stapler, intimating that they are not unusually carried on by the same person, and aid and contribute to the advancement of each other. And in the next place they quote from Shakspeare's comedy of the Winter's Tale, act 4th, scene 2d, in which it may be remembered the clown says,

"Let me see, every leaven weather tods—every tod yields £— and odd shillings—fifteen hundred shorn, what comes the wool to? I cannot do it without counters. Let me see, what am I to buy for our sheep shearing feast?

This, I believe, is the main argument in favor of wool stapling, and upon which I shall make a remark presently. Whence they derive their doctrine in regard to his being a glover, except it be from the charge of his having stolen a deer, or his familiarity with sheep-skin, I am somewhat at loss how to determine.

The third notion is, that he was a schoolmaster, and for this, among many other less important indications of the pedagogue, we are referred to the

4th act of Merry Wives of Windsor, scene between Sir Hugh Evans, Mrs. Page and her son William.

Evans. What is lapis, William?
William. A stone.
Evans. And what is a stone, William?
William. A pebble.
Evans. What is he, William, that does lend articles?
William. Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus declined: singulariter, nominativo, hic, hæc, hoc.
Evans. Pray you mark, genitivo, Hujus; well, what is your accusative case? &c.

And, fourthly, they have dignified him with the condition of an attorney's clerk. The reason for this is, that he appeared to be exceedingly familiar with the technicalities and legal phrases of the profession. This is true. The best representation of a wager of battle—an obsolete mode of trial, formerly recognised in England, that can be found any where, is to be found in Richard II, between Bolingbroke and Norfolk. And it is a matter of notoriety that in a case, which was the last of that kind and which led to the abrogation of the law, the case, I think, of Ashford against Thornton, which took place about ten years ago, Mr. Chitty, who chiefly conducted the pleadings, drew largely from the case to which I have referred. And in the trial in the Merchant of Ve-

nice, there is a vast deal of the lawyer skill exhibited, as well as in various other trials which are scattered through his Plays. But how absurd are all these conclusions to which I have adverted; how inconsistent with each other, and totally unsustained by the course of reasoning resorted to in their support. You might just as well say that he was a druggist, from his description of the apothecary in Romeo and Juliet; that he was a doctor, because he has drawn the character of a physician so exquisitely in the Play of Macbeth; or that he was a blacksmith, from his having so admirably described one of the sons of Vulcan in the Play of King John; or that he was a metaphysician, from his having suggested the best test of the sanity of mind which philosophy supplies, in the following passage in Hamlet, in the dialogue with the Queen:

> "My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,
> And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
> That I have uttered: put me to the test,
> And I the matter will reword,
> Which madness would gambol from."

It is an extraordinary fact, which may be mentioned with propriety here as related by Sir Henry Halford, in his lectures recently published, I quote from memory, but I trust with substantial accuracy,

that he, Sir Henry Halford, and Sir Thomas Tuthill, were called on to examine a young baronet, who had just executed his will, and who was suspected of unsoundness of mind. These eminent physicians, occupied a considerable portion of the day in the application of the various tests supplied by their own skill; and, finally, were about leaving the house without having arrived at any determination, when Sir Henry proposed, as a last resort, that they should apply Shakspeare's test; they accordingly did so—the patient was utterly unable to reword the matter—he gamboled from it, and left no doubt as to his total mental incompetency.

Perhaps the strongest indication of Shakspeare's legal learning, is to be found in the deduction of King Henry's title to the crown of France, although I believe that has never been referred to by any of the commentators, in support of their doctrine. No lawyer's brief in a case of ejectment, and that was intended to be a case of ejectment between kings, could be more perfect. The only inconsistency in it is, and that perhaps does not materially touch the present question, that he gives it to the Archbishop of Canterbury, instead of a lawyer. Allow me to ask your attention to the dialogue which is between King Henry and the Archbishop.

Vide Act 1st. Scene 2d.

Doctor Drake introduces a vast variety of instances in which legal terms are used in their technical sense; as thus, in King Henry IV, part 2d.

> "For what in me was purchased,
> Falls upon thee in a much fairer sort."

And purchase, it is here said, is used in a legal sense, and in contradistinction to an acquisition by descent. And again, in the Merry Wives of Windsor,

> "He lets the Devil have him in fee simple, with fine and recovery."

Then in the Comedy of Errors,

> "He's 'rested on the case."

And again in the Merchant of Venice,

> "Go with me to a notary, and seal me there a bond."

In Much Ado About Nothing, Dogberry charges the watch to keep their fellow's counsel, and their own. This is part of the oath of a Grand Jury —Then, in Othello this passage occurs:

> "Where is that Palace whereinto foul things
> Sometimes intrude not? who has a breast so pure—
> But some uncleanly apprehension
> Keeps leets and law days; and in session sit
> With meditations lawful."

Humbly complaining to your Highness.—Richard III.

Beginning of a bill in Chancery.

Are those precepts served? says Sharo to Davy, in King Henry IV.

Tell me what state, what dignity, what honor,
Can'st thou demise to any child of mine?—Richard III.

Demise is a term used in leases; and it is said that no poet but Shakspeare ever used the word in that sense.

Now it does not appear to me that all these instances present any stronger indication of the legal acquirements of Shakspeare, than can be shown from his works, in respect to all the arts and sciences to which he refers.

Upon this principle of reasoning I could prove that he was a judge, a soldier, a shoemaker, a watchman, an ostler, a justice of the peace, a herald, a legate, a king, in short, every thing.

All these instances prove no more than this—that he made himself thoroughly acquainted with every subject upon which he wrote; and in matters of history, except in some few instances wherein, for special purposes, he departed from what may be considered authentic, he was entirely to be relied upon. Perhaps one of the most remarkable features in the

writings of Shakspeare is, that, with the exception of his plot, which, so far as regards his historical plays, he generally obtained from Hollingshead, he borrowed from no one.

But what is still more remarkable, he never borrowed from himself. No man who has carefully examined Shakspeare, and who understands his spirit and style, can entertain any doubt as to his identity. There is a sort of general character that pervades every thing he wrote, that prevents its being misunderstood for the production of any other man. And that character is rather in the thought—the peculiarity of the thought, than the language; although it somewhat partakes of both. He seems to have had no partiality apparent in any part of his thirty six plays—for any particular expression —no pet phrases. Indeed he seems to have lost in creating one character all recollection of what he had previously done; and in short to have lost himself in the representation of others. It could be readily shown that in this he differs from almost all the great writers of antiquity, and also from those of modern date. Even Scott, the most fruitful among them all, and with whom a comparison may be more aptly instituted, can readily be detected, and indeed was so even in his fancied concealment,

by a certain peculiarity of expression, and a partiality to certain quaint terms which appear in every one of his volumes. We are not permitted to enter into a minute examination of this subject; it is rather incidental than necessary to our purpose, and it must so forcibly have struck others that it has nothing of novelty to recommend it. And I leave it therefore with these remarks.

The only book to which I can trace any thing like a similarity, is the Bible.

In Shylock, Merchant of Venice, in the scene between Portia and the Prince of Morocco, will be found this passage:

> "Dislike me not for my complexion;
> The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,
> To whom I am a neighbor, and near bred."

And in the Song of Solomon, 1st chapter and 6th verse, these words are to be found:

> "Look not upon me because I am black,
> Because the sun hath looked upon me."

In 1582, when but eighteen years of age, he married Ann Hathaway who was eight years older than himself. By this marriage he had three children, Susan, Judith, and a son whom he called Hamlet. I should suppose this was not a happy marriage, not

merely from the long absence of Shakspeare, but from his will, by which he left his wife only his "second best bed," as well as from the sentiments so perfectly consonant with nature expressed in his Play of The Twelfth Night.

> Let still the woman take
> An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
> So sways she level in her husband's heart.
> For howsoever we do praise ourselves
> Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
> More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won,
> Than women's are.
> Then let thy love be younger than thyself,
> Or thy affection cannot hold the bent;
> For women are as roses, whose fair flower
> Being once displayed doth fall that very hour.
>
> *Twelfth Night, Act 2d, Scene 4th.*

After his marriage, falling into dissolute associations, he was detected in poaching, in one of his frolics, upon the deer park of Sir Thomas Lucy. This appears to have been the result of imprudence simply, but inasmuch as he was treated with some severity by Sir Thomas, he in return lampooned him in a very severe pasquinade, which "is not fit for ears polite." His biographers seem to confirm the story by suggesting that the description in "As you like it," of the deer; and the reflections of the melancholy Jacques, arose from this circumstance,

Duke. Come shall we go and kill us venison?
And yet it irks me, the poor dapple fools,
Being native burghers of this desert city,
Should in their own confines, with forked heads,
Have their round haunches gored.

Lord. Indeed, my Lord,
The melancholy Jacques grieves at that;
And, in that kind, swears you do more usurp
Than doth your brother that hath banished you.
To day my Lord of Amiens, and myself,
Did steal behind him, as he lay along
Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook, that brawls along the wood,
To the which place, a poor sequestered stag,
That from the hunters aim had ta'en a hurt,
Did come to languish. And indeed, my lord,
The wretched animal heav'd forth such groans
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat
Almost to bursting.

As you like it.

Subsequently oppressed with poverty, and anticipating a prosecution for the libel, in the year 1586, he left Stratford for London, being then twenty-two years old, a beggar in purse, but rich in talent, beyond all the sons of men. Had not poverty and prosecution united in driving him from his humble occupation in Warwickshire, how many matchless lessons of wisdom and morality, how many unparalleled displays of wit and imagination, of pathos and sublimity, had been buried in oblivion. Pictures of emotion, of character, of passion, more profound than mere philosophy had ever conceived,

more impressive than poetry had ever yet embodied; strains which shall now sound through distant posterity, with increasing energy, harmony, and interest, and which shall powerfully and beneficially continue to influence and to mould both national and individual feeling.

His characters live and breathe before us—we perceive not only what they say and do, but what they feel and think; and we are tempted to believe that, like some magician of old, he possessed the art of transfusing himself into the frame, and speaking through the organs of those whom he wished to represent—so exactly has he drawn, without deviation from the general law and broad track of life, each class, condition and character of man.—Whether, says one of his commentators, he delineates the possessor of a throne, or the tenant of a cottage, the warrior in battle, or statesman in debate, youth in its fervor, or old age in its repose, guilt in torment, or innocence in peace, the votaries of pleasure, or the victims of despair—we behold each character developing itself, not through the medium of self-description, but as an actual experience, through the influence and progression of events, and the re-action of surrounding agents.

The late Lord Lyttleton, speaking of Shaks-

peare, says:—"No author had ever so copious, so bold, so creative an imagination, with so perfect a knowledge of the passions, the humors and the sentiments of mankind. He painted all characters, from heroes and kings down to innkeepers and peasants, with equal truth and equal force. If human nature were quite destroyed, and no monument left of it except his works, other beings might learn what man was, from those writings alone."

Doctor Johnson exhibits another picture of Nature's bard, which, although more pompous and more figurative, is not less true, when he says:—"The works of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed, and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented by flowers. The composition of Shakspeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes affording shelter to myrtles and roses—filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity."

Upon his arrival in London, he entered the Theatre, as we are told by Rowe, in a very mean rank. And even his ability to procure this post is conjectured to have arisen from his presumed knowledge of Green, and Burbige, and Hemming, at that time,

all greatly distinguished as Comedians, and some of whom were said to have resided in the native place of Shakspeare, to the influence of which circumstance, is ascribed even the mean rank which he acquired in Theatricals.

Others of his biographers present him in a still more degraded point of view. According to their account, coaches not being used at that period, for some time after his arrival in London, he waited at the doors of the Theatre, engaged in holding horses until the Play should be out.

Even in this very humble office, he is said to have been a favorite. Frequenters of the Theatre would trust none but Will Shakspeare, who rendered himself conspicuous by his care and his promptitude. His business thus becoming more extensive, he hired boys, who were subject to his inspection and control. At that time, it was quite a recommendation for employment to be able to say, "I am Shakspeare's boy." And long after Shakspeare had abandoned this occupation, those who still pursued it, went by the name of Shakspeare's Boys.

Doubts are entertained, and expressed, by many of the commentators upon Shakspeare, as to the truth of this story: and some of them deny it alto-

gether, upon the score of alleged improbability. I cannot perceive the improbability; reduced to beggary—driven from his home by persecution—leaving his wife and children to rely upon their friends, for a precarious subsistence—without, at any rate at that time, having acquired any fame that it was desirable to retain—arriving in London totally destitute, and requiring some means for immediate subsistence, I repeat it, I do not see the improbability of his having resorted to those measures to which I have above adverted. He had at that time written nothing. Venus and Adonis, the first heir of his invention, was written in 1593, of course, some time after the period to which we have referred. If you look to the reputation which he acquired some ten years afterwards, and connect that with his degraded occupation, upon his first arrival in London, to be sure, the improbability would be striking and startling. But there was a vast difference in the claims of Shakspeare, between those different and distant periods. Nay those who deny this humiliating account, do not themselves place the immortal bard in much more favorable circumstances. According to their account, he was first employed as a call-boy at the Theatre, for the purpose of assisting the prompter, and giving notice to

the players of their turn to appear, for which service he received six shillings and eight pence, per week.

It may be supposed that the degradation of Shakspeare was to be deplored—far from it—it was part of his study—part of the great volume of human nature, with every page of which he became so familiar. At the door, and behind the scenes of the Theatre—at the Boar's Head, and at the sign of the Mermaid—in poverty, and in comparative affluence with the companions of his looser hours, and in the pomp and parade of regal grandeur and display—he saw nature only. His study was man, exhibited in various phases, and in diversified circumstances; and under different masks—but still man. His spoil was the human heart; he became the master of all its passions, saw through all their devious courses, and stripped them at pleasure of their disguises. Hence it follows, that those who are best read in the Book of Nature, can best appreciate his worth. His mind was not directed to words, but to thoughts, and feeling, and therefore such critics as Johnson and Pope, and Warburton, and Voltaire, were for the most part incapable, with all their learning, of forming a just estimate of his value. Let us, by way of illustration, as one of a thousand instances,

take one from the familiar speech of Othello, when about to wreak his vengeance upon Desdemona:

> "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.
> Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars,
> It is the cause!"

> "Put out the light, and then put out the light.
> If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
> I can again thy former light restore,
> Should I repent me; but once put out thine,
> Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
> I know not where is that Promethean heat,
> That can thy light relume."

How simple, and yet how striking, is the transition of thoughts; from the extinguishment of the taper, to the extinction of life, the business in hand; and how unworthy are those judges of its beauty, who are quarrelling as to the true position of the comma in the line. Some read it as I have given it, others thus:

> "Put out the light and then, put out the light."

Others,

> "Put out the light, and then put out the light."

Others,

> "Put out the light, and then put out thy light."

It is stated by some of the Biographers of Shakspeare, that, shortly after the performance of this

play, at a meeting of one of the clubs, to which he belonged, he found the members, among whom were Burbige and Allen, engaged in a violent dispute, as to the true reading of this passage; each one contending for some one of these various readings. Upon his arrival, as was natural, they stated the points in dispute, and agreed to submit it to him to decide upon his own meaning:—"Why," said he, with unequalled modesty, "all your readings are very satisfactory, and appear to me to amount to the same sentiment. If the passage does not convey its own meaning, I am afraid I can give you no assistance. At all events one thing is certain: if you differ about the idea conveyed, it must be clear, that it conveys no idea very distinctly. And yet where is the heart that does not throb, or the eye that does not glisten with the fulness of its meaning?"

Again, in another passage, speaking of the influence of his jealousy, or his wife's supposed defection, he says:

> "O, it comes on the memory
> As does the raven on the infected house,
> Boding to all."

To the heart that does not feel this, explanation would be ridiculous; verbal criticism upon such pas-

TO BE INSERTED AT * ON PAGE 35.

Voltaire has attempted translating parts of Shakspeare, with the avowed object of enabling all Europe to compare the thoughts, the style and the judgment of Shakspeare, with the thoughts, style and judgment of Corneille.—And if Voltaire's translation is to be the test of Shakspeare's merit, we might almost yield the superiority to Corneille. To explain this suggestion let me give you one or two instances which are referred to in Montagu's Essay on the Genius of Shakspeare.

Brutus in remonstrating against the proposal of Cassius, after having destroyed Cæsar, to kill Mark Antony, speaks thus,

> "Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
> To cut the head off, and then hack the limbs,
> Like wrath in death, and envy afterwards,
> For Antony is but a limb of Cæsar."

Having translated this with tolerable accuracy, Voltaire attempts explaining it in the following way.

The word *course*, says he, "perhaps has an allusion to the Lupercal course: It also signifies a service of dishes at table." Thus confounding as you perceive a mode of conduct which the term *course* implies with a race ground or a banquet, and this is Voltaire the translator, who puts his own foolish cap on the venerable head of Shakspeare, and then laughs at the conceit:

Again,—

When Polonius orders his daughter not to confide in the promises of Hamlet, who being Heir to the Crown, cannot have liberty of

choice in marriage, like a private person, he must not, says the old Courtier,

"Carve for himself as vulgar persons do;"

The French Author translates it,

"He must not cut up his own victuals."

as if a banquet and not a marriage were the subject of consideration.

But to cap the climax of these absurdities, I will give one other of his innumerable blunders, which arose, first, from his not understanding his Author, and secondly, from his not understanding the English Dictionary, to which he referred for explanation and assistance.

Brutus thus expresses his fears that Imperial Power may change the conduct and character of Cæsar:

"Tis a common proof, that lowliness is young ambition's ladder
Whereto the climber upward turns his face,
But when he once attains the utmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Cæsar may.

The translation is not only not true, but directly opposed to the original:

And thus it runs.—

"One knows what ambition is.—The ladder of grandeur presents itself to her. In going up she hides her face from the spectators—When she's at the top she shows herself. Then raising her view to the Heavens, with a scornful look, her vanity disdains the steps of the ladder that made her greatness—that it is that Cæsar may do."

One might almost wish that this translation had been in rhyme—upon the principle adopted I think by Sir Walter Raleigh, or Sir Thomas More, who upon a foolish fellow exhibiting to him some of his prose composition, advised him to turn it into poetry, upon which

being done, ah ! said the Knight, it is better now. Before it possessed neither rhyme nor reason. And that is the precise character of this effort of Voltaire—in his own language, to give the most faithful translation that can be, and the only faithful one in the French Language, of any author ancient or modern.

The modesty of this announcement is equalled only by the merit of the performance. It was necessary it is true, if any comparison was to be instituted between Corneille and Shakspeare, that the English Dramatist should be somewhat cut up. But they should carve him as a dish fit for the Gods, not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds. In other words, borrowing from one of the very passages just referred to, in regard to Cæsar. Voltaire should not have cut his head off and then hacked his limbs.

Corneille is no more to be compared to Shakspeare than Voltaire is to Bacon, or Fenelon to Jeremy Taylor—or Searson to Voltaire. I could make this manifest, in a moment: but moments are not to be squandered upon Pigmies, when a Giant is in the field.

The objection of Voltaire to Shakspeare, although independently of this he never could have appreciated him, is founded upon the disregard of the unities, so rigidly adhered to by the French school, and we are told that this also was the foundation of the critic's preference for Addison's Cato, in which I believe he is solitary. For assuredly no man who is familiar with the English language, can seriously listen to the assertion that Addison even *approached* Shakspeare. There is more substance, more thought, more nature in one sentence of Shakspeare, than can be found in any one page of Cato, with the exception of that containing the beautiful soliloquy upon the immortality of the soul. That is a jewel to be sure—but it is set in lead—and not in pure gold and surrounded by brilliants which impart their aid to its lustre. If there must be comparisons, they should be between kindred spirits, but they are perfectly idle, to say nothing worse, when attempted in cases of such infinite disparity.

There is nothing that Shakspeare attempted in which he did not succeed. Succeed without any apparent effort, and beyond all competition. And although we wonder at the excellence and perfection of his knowledge of human nature, and cannot conceive of any rivalry; he himself, so far from appearing to exhaust his own resources, seems to throw off these productions as it were in the very prodigality of genius.

It has been suggested to be sure, that there are some characters in his Plays, that are so replete with extraordinary wit,—Mercutio for instance, that it became necessary for the poet to kill them early in the Play, or they would have killed the Poet: In other words, that the characters were too exquisitely drawn to be fully sustained through the five acts. This may do very well as a pithy and pretty saying, but it is obviously deficient in the important quality of truth. Shakspeare could have borne out as many Mercutio's as there are characters in the play in which he appears. His death was necessary to the plot. It was also necessary to prevent a divided interest, and he ceased to be important as one of the Dramatis Persona at the very moment the quarrel with Tybalt furnished the only supposable, generous cause, for the destruction of Juliet's Kinsman by Romeo.

It might as well be said that the character of Falstaff as exhibited in Henry IV. could not be continued, for in its line, it is as complete and peculiar as Mercutio's. Yet it *is* continued with unabated interest in the Merry Wives of Windsor—and if possible improved. Shakspeare suffers frequently in the hands of his commentators—by being necessarily brought down to their standard of judgment and criticism —at the same time that he is acknowledged to be altogether of a superior intellectual order. Great minds, in contemplating the efforts of inferiors, sometimes impart to them an importance which their authors never conceived—and inferior minds as often diminish the glory of the great—from the want of sufficient capacity entirely to *com*prehend it.

Mrs. Montagu in her essay on the genius of Shakspeare compared with Greek and French dramatists, very justly observes, that Shakspeare had the talents of an orator as well as of a poet. I know not, says she, that any poet, ancient or modern, has shown so perfect a judgment in rhetoric as our countryman. Those who are familiar with the speech of Hotspur in reference to the denial of his prisoners, and of Othello to the senate in vindication of his marriage, and of Brutus in excuse of the assassination of Cæsar, and of Mark Antony over the dead body of Cæsar, and of Ulysses to the Greek generals, on the subject of their intestine division, cannot fail to be satisfied that on the score of oratory and most consummate mastery of human reason, as well as human passion, he perhaps never had a superior.

When he approaches the human heart, he approaches it like its sovereign, and he sways and controls it with almost supernatural power. The greatest orator that ever lived never could have exercised a more powerful influence over the human mind than Shakspeare exercised wherever he attempted it. And the plain reason is that no other man was ever equally acquainted with the springs of human action; the control that he exerts over his Dramatis Personæ by the speeches which he puts into the mouths of his heroes, is a control which is equally felt by his audience and his readers. No one wonders at the results or effects produced by Shakspeare. They seem to be the natural consequence of his efforts. And what is very remarkable, is, that those efforts appear to cost him nothing, at the same time that they so far exceed in their product every thing of a similar character that has been accomplished by others. We may test this by taking any given subject, or thought, or feeling, upon which the attention of either ancient or modern writers has been bestowed, and upon examination it will be found that Shakspeare has expressed it more forcibly, more truly, and not less poetically. Reserving the comparison for a future lecture, let us here turn our attention to some few illustrations of

this doctrine. Hamlet, Othello, Hotspur, Brutus, Mark Antony, Ulysses.

The only man of note, except Voltaire, and his opinion on this subject was as worthless as his faith in matters of religion, that has attempted to disparage Shakspeare, is Lord Byron. And to make amends for this he bestows most lavish encomiums upon Pope. Pope was unquestionably a great poet, but he was no more to be compared to Shakspeare, than Lord Byron was to Homer. How perfectly absurd it is for men of the moral or intellectual structure of his Lordship even to fancy that his opinions can exercise any greater influence upon the fame of Shakspeare, than the reproaches of Thersytes upon the glory of Agamemnon. An apt commentary upon his opinions of the Drama is exhibited in his own want of dramatic success. This, no doubt, was attributed by him to a want of judgment in the mass of the community, whereas in truth it was an evidence of the correctness of that judgment, and of his own deficiency in the knowledge of human nature.

It is not by sounding phrases artfully and beautifully strung together, that the human heart, or the human mind is to be led captive. It is by well directed simplicity; by exhibitions of genius which almost every one can comprehend and apply—by fitness of means to objects—by speaking from the heart, and to the heart—by following and not by attempting to lead or pervert nature, that the genuine poet is rendered manifest.

Those who are accustomed to look at the text of Shakspeare as it is presented on the stage; where human nature is too often lost sight of, and where every hero seems to walk upon stilts, and mouth, and rant, and swell, and distort every thing to meet the unnatural proportions of his own views, have but very imperfect notions of the true character of the author or his productions. His strength is in his simplicity.

sages, is offensive and almost impious, and shews a pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. You might as well criticise the language of the mourner in the depth of overwhelming affliction, or analyse the tear to ascertain the extent of its parent sorrow, or dissect the heart in order to unfold the depth of its emotions. *

We have thus, with occasional episodes, reached that era in his life, when he commenced writing his Dramas. But even at this time there is almost the same barrenness of incident, as that complained of in respect to the earlier period of his history. The date of his first play is unknown—nor is its title exactly ascertained.—Malone, Chalmers, and Drake, differ not only as to date, but order of the plays; and perhaps all that can be safely said is, that he began his plays in the year 1590, when about twenty-six years old, with Henry VI, or Pericles; and closed his dramatic career, in 1613, with Othello or the Tempest—averaging nearly two plays a year, during that period. Thirty-six plays seem now, by common consent, to be ascribed to his pen. Schlegel gives him credit for three others—The London Prodigal, The Puritan, and a Yorkshire Tragedy; and expresses a high opinion of them. The other commentators, however, speak

them with great contempt, and utterly deny their authenticity. Whoever may be the author, and whatever may be their merits, they are by no means necessary to the immortality of Shakspeare. No comparison of merit can be instituted between them. You might as well attempt to compare the finest specimens of Grecian architecture, with the humbler, but not less useful, proportions of a beautiful thatched cottage, upon the borders of his favorite Avon. Each work was perfect in itself, and adapted to the purpose to which it was dedicated. The same master hand that was manifested in the one, was no less visible in the other. Whether you look to the sketch of Dogberry, or of Christopher Sly, or of Lancelot Gobo, or of Poins, or of Pistol, or of Falstaff, or elevate your eye to the loftier pretensions of Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Julius Cæsar, Lear, and the whole line of English Kings, the mind is equally satisfied, and the picture equally complete. But I must confess that, if there be any delineation of character in which Shakspeare appears even to excel himself, it is that of female loveliness and delicacy.

When he became so far elevated as to be known as an author, which was about the year 1590, his income, as directly derived from his works, must

still have been very meagre; as we are informed by the historians of that day, enough to alarm the playwrights of the present, as 6*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* was the price of a new play; and to this we may add 40 shillings, which was deemed equivalent for a dedication to a patron.

The patron of Shakspeare, however, the gallant and gay Lord Southampton, appears to have been not so deficient in liberality, as to govern himself by what was considered the general usage; but it is said that, although Shakspeare in visiting his Lordship, was only admitted into the buttery, yet he enjoyed very substantial proofs of his patron's munificence; having at one time, towards the close of his career in London, received from him the sum of 1000*l.*, equal to five times that amount at the present day; which of course materially contributed to build up the poet's fortune, and subsequently enabled him to make the purchase of an establishment called New Place, at his favorite Stratford, where he afterwards died.

After continuing for some time in his theatrical post, he was employed in adapting plays to the stage; and finally commenced writing himself.

He not only was a writer, but he became a performer: and many of his biographers endeavor to

make it appear that he was a successful performer. But in that they are entirely ovewhelmed by countervailing authority. The only two parts, in which he ever appeared, that were worth being remembered, in the former of which he is said to have been the most successful, was the Ghost in Hamlet, and Adam Winterton, in As you like it. We think, it may be considered as established, that, practically, he was no player. But he must have been thoroughly accomplished in the theory and philosophy of dramatic performances. Various instances might be adduced, to render this most manifest, if it were necessary. But it is sufficient to refer you, in proof of this position, to the admirable speech of Hamlet, containing his advice to the players—"Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you."

About this time, as has been intimated, he acquired considerable note. Lord Southampton, the friend of the gallant and unfortunate Essex, became his patron, and no doubt a liberal one. To him Shakspeare dedicated his poems of Venus and Adonis, and the Rape of Lucrece. The Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, also bestowed favors upon him. It is said, however, that these arose from a general devotion on their part, to plays and

sedition; and, as an evidence of it, they caused Richard the II to be performed the night before the execution of the gallant Essex.

But he was not simply in favor with these noblemen. Even Elizabeth herself, and, afterwards, King James deigned to smile upon his efforts. And the Comedy of the Merry Wives of Windsor was written, at the express command of the Queen, in a single fortnight—so obedient is genius and the Muses to sovereign power—in order that Falstaff might be exhibited under the influence of love. Neither the partiality of Elizabeth, nor that of her successor, James, will be extraordinary when it is remembered that both of them were rendered the subjects of the most delicate and fascinating flattery—flattery, to which even royalty must bow from the pen of Shakspeare; or as he is called by Ben Jonson, "the sweet swan of Avon." Jonson, as is said, referring to these complimentary passages, introduces these lines:

> "Sweet swan of Avon, what a sight it were
> To see thee in our waters yet appear,
> And mark those flights upon the banks of Thames,
> That did so take Eliza and our James."

The first of these passages, to which I have referred, is to be found in the speech of Archbishop

Cranmer, in Henry VIII, Act 5th, scene 4th. It was pronounced upon the christening of Elizabeth, and thus it runs:

This royal infant, (Heaven still move about her!)
Though in her cradle, yet now promises
Upon this land a thousand, thousand blessings,
Which time shall bring to ripeness. She shall be
(But few now living can behold that goodness)
A pattern to all Princes living with her,
And all that shall succeed. Sheba was never
More covetous of wisdom and fair virtue,
Than this pure soul shall be; all princely graces,
That mould up such a mighty piece as this is,
With all the virtues that attend the good,
Shall still be doubled on her; truth shall nurse her.
Holy and heavenly thoughts still counsel her.
She shall be loved and feared; her own shall bless her;
Her foes shake like a field of beaten corn,
And hang their heads with sorrow; good grows with her.
In her days, every man shall eat in safety,
Under his own vine, what he plants, and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbors.
God shall be truly known, and those about her
From her shall read the perfect ways of honor,
And by those claim their greatness, not by blood.
She shall be, to the happiness of England,
An aged Princess; many days shall see her,
And yet no day without a deed to crown it.
Would I had known no more! but she must die;
She must, the Saints must have her. Yet a virgin,
A most unspotted lily, shall she pass
To the ground, and all the world shall mourn her.

Either not deeming King James deserving of an independent compliment, or conceiving that to connect him in praise with his great predecessor, would

be more gratifying to his pride, the Poet, after the death of Queen Elizabeth, which took place in the year 1602, introduced into the benediction of Cranmer, the following passage:

> Nor shall this peace sleep with her, but as when
> The bird of wonder dies, the maiden Phœnix,
> Her ashes new create another heir
> As great in admiration as herself,
> So shall she leave her blessedness to one,
> (When Heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness,)
> Who, from the sacred ashes of her honor,
> Shall star-like rise as great in fame as she was;
> And so stand fixed. Peace, plenty, love, truth, terror,
> That were the servants to this chosen infant,
> Shall then be his, and like a vine grow to him.
> Wherever the bright sun of Heaven shall shine,
> His honor and the greatness of his name
> Shall be, and make new nations.—He shall flourish
> And, like a mountain cedar, reach his branches
> To all the plains about him. Our children's children
> Shall see this and bless Heaven.

But the tribute to royalty was not confined to these instances. It is said that Elizabeth, I suppose finding nothing peculiarly gratifying to her pride in the play of Henry VIII, apart from the passage just referred to, took unusual interest in the performance of Richard III; and the reason assigned is, and no doubt truly, that that play exhibits her grandfather in the most alluring and favorable point of view. It was indeed necessary that the poet should borrow something from his fancy, in delineating the

character of that Prince; for, unless in early life he exhibited greater virtues and magnanimity than in matured age, his overthrow of Richard III would almost have been a subject to be deplored.

Not content however with these encomiums pronounced upon royalty, there will be found in Midsummer Night's Dream, a sixth play written in the year 1593, when Elizabeth was in all her glory; a passage exhibiting the most winning and fascinating compliment—nothing can surpass its beauty. It is no doubt familiar to most of you, as it has been introduced most admirably by Scott, in his novel of Kenilworth. But familiar as it may be, it is impossible to withhold it upon this occasion. The scene is between Oberon and Puck.

"That very time I saw, but thou could'st not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth
Cupid all armed; a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal, throned by the west,
And loosed his love shafts smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passed on,
In maiden meditation fancy free.
Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell—
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love in idleness."

Nor was the praise so bestowed upon King James a solitary instance; for in Macbeth, act scene

Banquo, who, according to the history from which that play was taken, and according to the truth, was no doubt a moral participant in the murder of Duncan, is represented as influenced by the most generous and magnanimous principles; and the cause of this appears to be a determination, on the part of Shakspeare, to give no offence to royalty—King James himself being a descendant of this very Banquo. This deduction is perfectly clear. Fleance, after the murder of Banquo, escaped into Wales, where he married. His son subsequently visited Scotland, and there became Lord High Steward. He married, and from that stock the royalty of Scotland sprung.

And in Macbeth's soliloquy before the murder of Banquo, act 3d, scene 1st,

> "Our fears on Banquo
> Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
> Reigns that which would be feared: 'tis much he dares;
> And to that dauntless temper of his mind
> He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor,
> To act in safety. There is none but he
> Whose being I do fear; and under him
> My genius stands rebuked—as, it is said,
> Mark Anthony's was by Cæsar."

Even after referring to those passages, it must strike every one that there was nothing in Shakspeare of that fulsome adulation, which disgraced the age. That he was grateful for favors conferred upon him in his necessities, and that his gratitude was eloquent, is no matter of reproach; but he neither courted flattery, nor wasted his rich opinions upon those around. And it is truly remarked, perfectly free from envy as he must have been, that he has not written a single line, either in praise or censure, of any of his cotemporaries.—Nothing mean, nothing contemptible, is to be found in any portion of his works. And although, as has been said, his great qualities were not fully appreciated by others during his life—that he felt fully convinced of his own superiority, though apparently the humblest

among the humble, is not to be doubted. The mind capable of such productions, must have been capable of knowing their full value. And yet it has been said, that he entertained no impression, that these offsprings of his genius would survive their author; and that, in all his dramas, there is not a solitary reference from which the inference of such an idea could be drawn. Upon examining his plays, this notion will be found to be sustained; and, for a very obvious reason, they neither required nor admitted of any reference to himself. But, if you will look to his sonnets, which afforded some scope for the manifestation of individual motive and feeling, it will be rendered perfectly clear, that he entertained, even in early life, the brightest imaginings of future glory.—How else are these passages to be construed.

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of Princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.
But you shall shine more bright in these contents,
Than unwept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars's sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory;
'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity,
Shall you pace forth. Your praise shall still find room,
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom.

So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this and dwell in lovers eyes.

Like as the waves make towards the pebble shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each clanging pace, with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith, being crowned,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And time, that gave, doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow;
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth;
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
Though I once gone, to all the world must die,
The earth can yield me but a common grave,
When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.
Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created, shall o'er read;
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse.
When all the breathers of this world are dead,
You still shall live; such virtue hath my pen
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.
Now with the drops of this most balmy time,
My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes,
Since, spite of him, I live in this poor rhyme.
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes,
And thou in this, shall find thy monument,
When tyrants' crests, tombs of brass, are spent.

In the age in which he lived, no one dealt so little in the splended traffic of praise for praise, or

These Sonnets and his early Poems, although almost lost sight of in the blaze of his after fame, manifest the germs of a poetical genius which belongs to Shakspeare alone. They may be compared for strength and harmony of thought, although, indeed, we rarely hear of them, with the very best efforts of the works of those poets whose precocity has astounded the world.

Chatterton, it is true, was younger than Shakspeare, and truly a wonderful boy. But there's nothing of that sterling bullion, in his imitations of Rowley, which is possessed by these earlier efforts of Shakspeare.

Pope may be another supposed competitor for early renown; but there is a deficiency in thought, in his famous Essay upon criticism, which totally disqualifies it for any comparison with Shakspeare. I shall not pause, therefore, to examine into the relative merits of our author, and those writers to whom I have adverted, but will test him, even at this period of life, with Virgil the Prince of Roman poets, when in his maturity. And that too in reference to a matter of description, which did not constitute, what may be considered, the forte of Shakspeare. Take, for instance, the description of the horse: in which certainly both of them are sur-

passed, by this most sublime passage from the Book of Job, which is indeed worthy of Divine inspiration, and distances all human effort:

Hast thou given the horse strength?
Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?
Canst thou make him afraid as a grass-hopper?
The glory of his nostrils is terrible.

He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength.

He goeth on to meet the armed men.

He mocketh at fear, and is not affrigted, neither turneth he back from the sword.
The quiver rattleth against him,
The glittering spear and the shield.
He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage, neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet.
He saith among the trumpets ha—ha, and he smelleth the battle afar off.—The thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

Virgil—

Upright he walks, on pasterns firm and straight;
His motions easy; prancing in his gait;
The first to lead the way to tempt the flood,
To pass the bridge unknown, nor fear the trembling wood.
Dauntless at empty noises; lofty necked;
Sharp headed, barrel-belly'd, broadly backed;
Brawny his chest, and deep; his color gray;
For beauty, dappled, or the brightest bay:
Faint white and dun, will scarce the rearing pay.

The fiery courser, when he hears from far
The sprightly trumpets, and the shouts of war,
Pricks up his ears; and, trembling with delight,
Shifts place, and paws, and hopes the promis'd fight.
On his right shoulder his thick mane reclin'd,
Ruffles at speed, and dances in the wind.
His horny hoofs are jetty black and round;

His chine is double. Startling, with a bound,
He turns the turf, and shakes the solid ground.
Fire from his eyes, clouds from his nostrils flow;
He bears his rider headlong on the foe.

Shakspeare—

Imperiously he leaps—he neighs—he bounds,
And now his woven girths he breaks asunder;
The heaving earth with his hard hoofs he wounds,
Whose hollow womb resounds like heaven's thunder.
His ears up prick'd; his braided hanging mane
Upon his compass'd crest, now stands on end;
His nostrils drink the air, and forth again,
As from a furnace, vapors doth he send.
Sometimes he trots, as if he told the steps,
With gentle majesty and modest pride;
Anon, he rears upright, curvettes and leaps,
As who should say lo! thus my strength is tried.
Look when a painter would surpass the life,
In limning out a well proportioned steed,
His art with nature's workmanship at strife,
As if the dead, the living should exceed.
So did this horse excel a common one,
In shape, in courage, color, pace and bone;
Round hoofed, short jointed, fetlock shag and long,
Broad breast, full eye, small head, and nostril wide,
High crest, short ears, straight legs, and passing strong,
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide;
Look, what a horse should have, he did not lack,
Save a proud rider, on so proud a back.

It will be observed, although certainly this description has no merit, comparable to that in Job, it is by no means inferior to that of the Roman Poet. And when it is remembered that Shakspeare, at the time of writing Venus and Adonis, was little more than twenty years of age, that it

was the first of his productions, and no doubt written under the coercion of poverty, it is not easy to conceive a more precocious poetical talent than it exhibits. Still its great treasure, as is the case in all his works, is in its rich vein of thought. There are no expletives about it. Every word seems to tend directly to its object; and it is much to be doubted whether the same powerful description could, in the same number of words, be furnished in prose, even by the most sententious and powerful of the prose writers. Innumerable instances of this characteristic of Shakspeare, even in early life, could be supplied from his works. I shall content myself with one written at about the same period of time, and with which, perhaps, most of you are familiar, upon the subject of beauty. Somewhat quaint to be sure, but not the less striking on that account,

" Beauty is but a vain, a fleeting good,
A shining gloss that fadeth suddenly,
A flower that dies when almost in the bud,
A brittle glass that breaketh presently.
A fleeting good, a gloss, a glass, a flower,
Lost, faded, broken, dead within an hour.
As goods when lost we know are seldom found,
As faded gloss no rubbing can excite,
As flowers when dead are trampled on the ground,
As broken glass no cement can unite,
So Beauty, blemished once, is ever lost,
In spite of physic, painting, pains, and cost.

I think it is to be gathered from all Shakspeare's works, and from every thing that we can learn in relation to him, that he was blesed with a most even and amiable temperament. He held the world but as the world. The whole course of his sentiments is of the nobler order. Nothing of envy, vindictiveness, revenge, avarice, seems to have belonged to him. He describes them all, but it is obvious that that description is the result of observation alone. It is also remarkable, that with afflictions enough to have crushed any ordinary man, he shows no irratibility, no peevishness, no despondency. And it is still more remarkable, that when, by his unassisted efforts, he had elevated himself into moderate competency, not to say affluence, he was the same man; having never been obsequious in his adversity, never became arrogant from prosperity.

I have been anxious to disabuse the minds of a portion of the public, and a most respectable portion too, in regard to the character and works of Shakspeare. From the age in which he lived, which was undoubtedly an age of great licentiousness, as well as learning, it is not to be denied that he has occasionally adopted a freedom of expression, which, in the course of improved morality, might be deemed reprehensible. But these blemishes are, like the spots upon the Sun, lost in his general splendor.

There is another reason why Shakspeare is a sealed book to that valuable portion of the community, already referred to, and that arises from an antipathy, or at least an objection to dramatic performances; or to their pernicious effect upon the morals of mankind. I am not about to defend the Drama, nor can it be denied that the Plays of Shakspeare constitute its proudest and most imperishable pillars. But I protest against the notion that, because in the earlier periods of their history, players were considered as a vagabond, an outcast tribe, that, therefore, prejudice accumulating against them in the progress of years, not only should they be decried and degraded, but that every thing connected with them, however meritorious in itself, should share in their fate, and thereby be rendered relatively unholy. The exhibition of human nature as it is, may not always have a tendency to improve its condition. But it nevertheless is necessary, that evils should be known, in order to their reformation or correction. But to those who are fastidious, on this subject, we might say that an expurgated edition of Shakspeare would remove all objection. Most of those, however, who do object, do so in the very blindness of prejudice, inherited, inveterate, uncompromising prejudice; and yet a prejudice not *to be condemned*, as it is founded in honorable, and

honest and religious principles. They have probably never read the work; or if they have read it, they have read but portions of it, and those not fitted to impart correct views of its general character.

I confess that it has always appeared to me, impossible to be well informed in the works of Shakspeare, without being improved in affections, in morals, in a knowledge of the world, and, strange as it may appear, after what has been said, in Piety. If the work were studied, however, merely for its language, it would well repay the student. And that man is to be pitied, though certainly not condemned, who passes from the cradle to the grave, without once having quenched his thirst by drinking largely at this Pierian spring. In short, it would seem at this day, that a knowledge of Shakspeare, not that which is derived from the Stage, but which springs from study, is almost an essential of education. His language is so engrafted upon, nay incorporated with, the English stock, that even the most ordinary conversation, can hardly be carried on without drawing from it, and can hardly be appreciated without understanding it.

In the sciences, particularly in that of the Law, and also in Physic, it is almost a text book. And I think it was Lord Tenterden, who was held up to great contempt, when a barrister quoted a pas-

sage on the subject of insanity from Hamlet, by inquiring who was the author of it? This may be a slander upon his lordship, as I trust it is, but it at least serves to show the jealousy and interest, which the whole world takes in the fame of the immortal bard. It has been said that in Legal and Medical science, Shakspeare is an avowed and deserved favorite, and you must not be surprised, when I assure you that, practically, he is scarcely less favored in the Pulpit. For while few clergymen will run the hazard of openly avowing their predilection for him, there are but few religious discourses that do not derive much of their beauty, sublimity, pathos and piety, from this very source.

In some instances, this may unwittingly be done. For, as has been said, the language and sentiments of Shakspeare impregnate the very atmosphere we breathe. And many a man quotes both, who never dreams of their parentage, while perhaps he is condemning the author in the same sentence. You will find in the Psalms and the Hymns of Watts, many quotations from Shakspeare. And if it were allowable, in a discourse like this, it could readily be shown, that there is scarcely a discourse, published or delivered since his time, that does not owe something to his exhaustless and all pervading genius.

in the sordid one of praise for pay, as Shakspeare. His silence, however, proceeded neither from envy nor austerity. His freedom from the vice of adulation, is equally striking and honorable. There was a native generosity of soul in Shakspeare, which did not content itself with negative merit. In the Play of The Twelfth Night, in which Sir Toby directs Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in the way of a challenge to his adversary, to taunt him with the license of ink, "*And if thou thous't him some thrice, it shall not be amiss,*" he designed to express his esteem for the injured Raleigh, and to stigmatise the arrogance of Coke, by whom Raleigh had thus been insulted on his trial. In the number, the variety, and the exquisite beauty of his portraitures of female character, no writer of any time, or any language, can sustain a comparison with Shakspeare. And those who have experienced the disgust of the females of Ben Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher, and Massinger, can alone appreciate the obligations of the sex and of society, to him whose soul was capable of conceiving, and his hand of delineating such models of purity and loveliness as Juliet, Imogene, Cordelia, Desdemona, Miranda and Rosalind. In short, all of which have been so beautifully examined by one lady and personated by another, who have

added, by their charms and accomplishments, to the attractions of this author. All his vices were those of the age. His virtues were his own.

Milton's hope of immortality seemed to centre in himself—Shakspeare's in his works. You scarcely ever find any attempt to embody his personal identity with his reputation after death. And it has been truly observed, by a modern writer, that he has bequeathed, in addition to his works, the great lesson to his fellow men, that they who desire to stand greatest in the eyes of others, must learn first to be nothing in their own.

In the year 1613, having previously purchased New Place and some 110 acres of land, in the vicinity of Stratford; disgusted with the position of a player, which had always been the result rather of constraint than choice, as appears by sonnet 110, he left London, and sought retirement on the banks of his beloved Avon. He was then about fifty years old; and from that period, until his death, which happened two years afterwards, he enjoyed the blessedness of undisturbed retirement. Shakspeare in retirement! at the age of fifty, and after the production of thirty six plays—each one an immortality. Can any picture be conjured up *by* the human mind, or presented *to* the human mind,

greater or more glorious than that? The retirement of Shakspeare, must have been like the fabled retirement of Apollo, among the groves of the Graces and the Muses, for he was ever surrounded by them. His mind was an eternal and exhaustless spring. At the touch of his magic wand, life presented itself before him in all its countless and endless varieties. His temper was of so sweet, placid and harmonious a turn, that, during the whole progress of his life, he appears never to have made an enemy, or lost a friend. His wit, and diversity of fancy, as exhibited in his conversations, are said to have been unequalled. And at the famous retreat of the Mermaid, and the Boar's head, where Jonson, and Donne, and Selden, and Beaumont, and Fletcher assembled, although there were men among them more famous for their book learning, he stood unrivalled, for his knowledge and exposition of the springs of human nature; and made them, without effort, all tributary to himself.

In person, he is described as a handsome well shaped man, although intellectual effort is said to have performed the work of time upon him, and "delved the parallels" in his expansive brow; if the busts which have been handed down to us, bear true denotement of the original, the casket was

not unworthy of the jewel it contained. It is impossible to contemplate the spirit, the play and sympathy of feature; the lofty and broad forehead; the beautifully chiselled mouth; the general intellectual manifestations, without entertaining the desire that the portrait should resemble the prototype. Milton is said to have been eminently handsome in his youth. But certainly there is no comparison between the alleged resemblances of Milton, and those of our immortal Bard.

With all his immense genius, added to all his harmonious structure of temper, it must nevertheless be apparent to every one who is familiar with the general current of his life, that in his conjugal relation, at least, he was far, very far, from enjoying that felicity which would seem to have been the just reward of a character so truly estimable and glorious. This may not have been ascribable entirely to his wife; for it is a little surprising that the greatest Poets, that English history embraces, have been comparatively wretched in their matrimonial alliances. This is a matter of notoriety in regard to Milton. But still it is not so remarkable in relation to him, he being a man of rigid and austere habits, as in respect to Shakspeare, who seems to have been beloved wherever he was

known. No one of the productions of Shakspeare appears to have been written at Stratford, although that rural and delightful retreat might seem to have been more favorable to the influence of the Muses. They are sometimes, however, jealous mistresses; and although there may have been little of the character in the wife of the poet to excite their ire, it does not follow that the converse of the proposition would be equally true.

In the general, poets, who deal with the ideal world, are perhaps not the best adapted to the enjoyment of domestic happiness, or the every day scenes of ordinary life. They can command at will all that is beautiful—all that is sublime—all that is attractive—by the exercise of the potent spell of the imagination; and, by the same spell, they can exclude from their companionship, and from their society, every thing that may be calculated to disturb or annoy them. In this habitual ideal indulgence, the sensibilities and the desires of life become refined, and at length they are rendered totally incompetent for the enjoyment of the grosser scenes, by which they are surrounded. I would not have it understood, however, that such was the character of Shakspeare. His great worth seemed to depend upon an extensive and almost in-

tuitive knowledge of human nature. There's nothing in his productions either over done or come tardy of. His domestic dessension, therefore, may perhaps rather be ascribed to the influence of earlp misfortunes, upon his subsequent career in life.—Driven from his home, into such a metropolis as London, but a few years after his marriage; compelled to remain abroad, by the hard hand of a vexatious need; permitted to revisit those scenes whence all the virtues of social life seemed to spring —at the most, but once in a year; continuing in his absence for nearly twenty years; and forming, no doubt, associations rather through constraint, than inclination, which were inimical to domestic peace; it can hardly be supposed, although he manifested strongly the desire, to seclude himself within the bosom of his family, where, to use his own language, "*Either he must live, or have no life,*" that he bore with him such associations, and such reflections, as were calculated to render that desire available.

But three years after his return, on the very day on which he attained his fifty second year, and on the same day on which died the great Cervantes, so far as regarded the body, the worldly career of Shakspeare was terminated. His will, which was written

in perfect health, and in the full possession of those faculties, which have enriched the world, was executed about a month before his decease. He passed from the stage of life, for aught that we can learn from history, unwept, unhonored, and unmourned. To strike his works from the literature of nations, for they are now the property of all nations, would create a gap in the intellectual enjoyments of life, which perhaps nothing could supply. And yet all that belonged to Shakspeare, at that time, seemed to be deposited in the narrow house which is appointed for all living, and covered by that plain marble slab, which gave but little other denotement of its immortal tenant, than his name.

I have thus, in a very hasty, and I fear unsatisfactory manner, traced the immortal Bard from his cradle to his grave. It is manifest that, so far as the details of his life are dependent upon facts, either derived from his biographers, or tradition, the materials supplied are exceedingly limited and imperfect. Indeed even if the opportunities of information were greater, it is much to be doubted whether they would be more fruitful. His life at last, so far as regards moral or intellectual indications, (and they may be said to constitute the valuable portions of the life of every man), could, in

any event, only be derived from his works. For twenty-five years, about one half of his existence, he was engaged in the composition of his Plays. Out of those he must have been comparatively unknown. But they have created for him a memorial which no time can efface.